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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CRAVAACK).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,

February 1, 2012.

I hereby appoint the Honorable CHIP CRAVAACK to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 17, 2012, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

GOVERNMENT PERSECUTION OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we hear about religious persecution throughout the Third World, but there is an anti-religious movement right here in the United States. The Catholic Church is being persecuted by this government.

Our great country was founded on the principle of religious liberty. This right is in the First Amendment, and

the provisions of the First Amendment are listed first because they are the most important. Yet, the administration is chipping away at this cornerstone of our society by violating the religious liberty of those who hold fast to certain positions of their faith, in particular, those of the Catholic Church.

The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced that religious organizations will be forced to provide their employees with medical insurance that covers free contraceptives and sterilizations.

While houses of worship are exempt, religiously affiliated organizations such as hospitals, universities, and charities are mandated to comply with this government edict. This goes against the basic tenets of the Catholic religion, as well as other faiths, Christian and non-Christian.

The administration believes that it's enough to give religious organizations 1 year's notice to comply with this government oppression. But there will never be enough time for the church to change its core principles.

Timothy Dolan, president of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops and New York archbishop, said it best: "In effect, the President is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences."

Mr. Speaker, religious principles are not negotiable. They are not to be subject to bullying by any government, especially ours. No government has the legal or moral right to target any religions and make them violate their religious conscience.

The administration is violating two provisions of the First Amendment: the free exercise of religion clause and the establishment of religion clause. The government is prohibiting the free exercise of religion because it is punishing Catholics for exercising their religious beliefs.

Government is also violating the establishment clause by establishing a

government religion, statism, because government is establishing its own moral standard that must be complied with or else. Regardless of where Americans stand on the issues of contraception, sterilization, or the abortion pill, this government oppression should be alarming for those who believe the government should not punish religions or substitute a religious doctrine for citizens. The government should stay out of the business of persecuting religions.

This recent anti-religious mandate is completely unacceptable, but it is only one example in a long line of new government actions that disregard freedom of conscience and religious liberty. This comes on the heels of the administration's denial of a grant to the United States Council of Catholic Bishops to aid victims of human trafficking. Not only have they been awarded this grant in the past, but their application has received the highest quality score.

Mr. Speaker, this money is used to help victims from the scourge of human slavery. But the church was denied this grant because their religious convictions do not provide contraceptives or refer women to abortions. Apparently, under this administration, in order to aid victims, it is necessary for religious groups to violate their religious convictions.

These are only two of the most recent assaults by government, our government, on religious liberty and conscience. As soon as this administration came into office, a proposal was submitted to rescind conscience regulations for medical professionals. Protections for medical professionals who would not violate their conscience by distributing emergency contraceptives was rescinded. This was just a glimpse of what was to come in deliberate disregard for the First Amendment.

This administration's attack on religious liberty is a strike at the core principles of our Nation. Government

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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